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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS, DEPARTMENT FOR H,
DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO USDA FOR ROBIN TILSWORTH

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SUBJECT: NYANZA IS ISOLATED, RESIDENTS TELL AMBASSADOR

¶1. The people of Nyanza are isolated from Nairobi, residents and officials from the Province told the Ambassador during his one-day trip to the area February 21. While there, he participated in a school dedication, presented awards to CDC Kenyan staff, and launched a food security assistance program. Nyanza remains one of Kenya's most densely populated, poor, and heavily HIV/AIDS affected regions, characterized by strong tribal identity (Luo), and increasingly at political odds with the government. The province is a case-study in Kenyan personality politics with favorite son MP Raila Odinga, whose parliamentary constituency is actually in Nairobi, remaking his political career out of being on the opposite side of the government.

IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD TIME FOR POLITICS

¶2. At Odinga's invitation, the Ambassador traveled to Nyanza Province in Western Kenya on Lake Victoria to attend a ceremony to rename two schools in Kogelo, Siaya District for U.S. Senator Barack Obama. Obama's grandparents donated the land on which the institutions were built. The Senator sent a letter to the Kogelo community, which the Ambassador presented during the function, recognizing the community's dedication to education. The Odinga family's political and ancestral roots are in Nyanza: Raila's father and independence activist Jaramogi Oginga Odinga was from Siaya and held the Bondo parliamentary seat which brother Oburu Odinga now occupies. As a result, Raila has a rock star's ability to draw a crowd, and his arrival at the schools was met with cheers and song, overpowering the music from the loudspeaker truck that preceded him. Speaking before the audience of nearly 1,000 students, teachers, and community members, Odinga, and his LDP colleague MP Sammy Weya, announced that it would be impossible for them to pass up an opportunity to make a political statement. They proceeded to call for the resignation of President Kibaki, Vice President Moody Awori, and others recently implicated in massive corruption scandals.

LEGUME COMMERCIALIZATION

¶3. In support of improving food security in Kenya's western region, the Ambassador participated in the launch of a program to help farmers move into legumes production, growing in particular groundnuts, chickpeas, and pigeonpeas. The initiative, supported by USDA and implemented by NGO Technoserve, aims to help develop a business approach to farming. The launch took place at a press conference in the provincial capital Kisumu, attended by local MPs, the Nyanza

and Western Provincial Commissioners, other donors, and media members. The Ambassador stated that to strengthen the country against the effects of recurrent drought, the government needs strong political will and commitment to establish prevention and response mechanisms.

¶4. In Nyanza, the challenge to succeed is not limited to farmers. Prominent local businessmen emphasized to the Ambassador the enduring obstacles they face from dilapidated infrastructure, erratic and expensive energy supplies, and the rising cost of doing business. Frustrated, they echoed the Province's sense of marginalization and isolation, both physical and political, from the resources of a government that includes almost no Luos.
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